

Testimony of
[Kelly Genzlinger, Genetic Counselor, Hartford Healthcare Cancer Institute]
In support of
SB 857- AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE FOR GENETIC COUNSELORS
February 20, 2015

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Markley, Representative Srinivasan and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Kelly Genzlinger and I am writing to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 857- An Act Concerning Licensure for Genetic Counselors.

I currently work as a cancer genetic counselor at The Hartford Healthcare Cancer Institute at Hartford Hospital's Helen & Harry Gray Cancer Center – located at 85 Retreat Avenue in Hartford, Connecticut.

Genetic counselors are professionals whose training includes a Master's degree and mandatory continuing education. Genetic counselors provide an important and needed service. They have expertise in genetics and genetic counseling and function as an essential member of the health care team. Genetic counselors have the ability to explain, accurately and in easy-to-understand terms, difficult and constantly evolving genetic information to patients; evaluate a complex family history; and, evaluate the need for genetic testing. They provide genetic information in a context of supportive care and sensitivity that is tailored to each patient's/family's particular needs. Genetic counselors encourage communication among family members regarding the inherited nature of the disease.

An important standard of care in healthcare is being up to date with information. Genetic counselors keep up-to-date through their training and continuing education, with advances in genetic technology, refinements in genetic testing and the implications of testing for the individual and their family members. With the rapid advances in genetic technology, genetic testing and counseling services are quickly moving to the forefront of biosciences. With this in mind, licensure is needed in order to ensure that the quality of these professionals remains high and that the public is afforded the best level of care.

There is potential for harm if individuals represent themselves as genetic counselors without adequate levels of training and continuing education. Examples of possible adverse events include incomplete risk assessments being performed, the wrong test being ordered and/or results misinterpreted, inadequate/inappropriate genetic counseling being provided resulting in advanced cancer diagnoses, unnecessary prophylactic surgeries, and psychological distress. Licensure can ensure that patients are protected from unqualified providers, and unregulated practices.

The demand for genetic counseling and testing is increasing every day. Licensure of genetic counselors will assist those healthcare providers making referrals by identifying qualified and appropriately trained professionals. Not to mention, licensure will remove constraints on billing for genetic counseling, thereby allowing medical centers to hire more genetic counselors and improve patient access. Incorporating genetic counselors into the testing process has been shown to lead to cost-efficient risk identification and more appropriate genetic testing. Significant savings in healthcare spending for patients with cancer, neurological disorders, cardiac disorders, and other genetic diseases has been documented.

I urge you to support this important legislation. If you have any questions or would like to discuss please feel free to reach out to me. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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